

Appl. No. : 09/965,908
Filed : September 27, 2001

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30. The gaming system in accordance with Claim 25 wherein said player tracking device
includes a ticket printer and said bonus award information is printed on a ticket dispensed to said
player by said ticket printer.

REMARKS

This is in response to the Office Action mailed November 4, 2002. Originally presented
Claims 1-19 have been canceled and Claims 20-30 are presented herein.

By this Response, Applicant has amended the Abstract so that it no longer exceeds 15 lines
and 150 words.

By the Office Action, the Examiner provisionally rejected Claims 1-7 under the judicially
created doctrine of obviousness-type double patenting in view of Claims 1-7 of co-pending
application 09/903,095. Applicant asserts that this rejection has been obviated in view of the
cancellation of original Claims 1-7 of this application and the presentation of new Claims 20-30.

The Examiner rejected Claim 4 under 35 U.S.C. § 112(2) as being indefinite. Applicant
asserts that this rejection has been obviated as a result of the cancellation of this claim.

The Examiner rejected Claims 1-19 under 35 U.S.C. § 102(e) as being anticipated by Acres
6,319,125. Applicant asserts that Claims 20-30 are patentable over the prior art, including Acres,
for at least the following reasons.

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Independent Claim 20

Independent Claim 20 is directed to a method of awarding a bonus to a player of a game. In accordance with the invention as claimed, a bonus award is funded separately from monies which a player wagers to play a game at a gaming machine. In the event the player meets criteria for winning a bonus event, the player is awarded the bonus award.

As detailed in the Background of the Application at paragraph [0006], one disadvantage to existing games is the way in which bonuses are funded. As indicated, bonuses are generally funded from a an additional “side” wager by a player, or from a portion of the funds which the player wagers to play the game. This prior art arrangement is utilized by Acres. As disclosed in the Abstract of Acres, “[a] percentage of a wager played on each gaming device is accumulated into a bonus pool stored on the bonus server.” Further, as indicated by Acres at Col. 4, lines 49-51, “[a] base percentage 303 of each wager 301 is accumulated into a bonus pool 304 for funding each bonus prize.”

It will be appreciated that the configuration of the invention has numerous advantages over this prior art. In the configuration of Acres, the amount of money which can be paid back to players based upon winning events is reduced by the amount of bonuses paid out. In other words, a player’s chance of receiving a main game win is likely reduced because a portion of the wagers are set aside to fund bonus wins. Thus, a player is to some degree penalized with respect to play of the main game because of the institution of bonuses. Further, as in the situation described in Acres, the bonus award may only be available when the bonus pool has been sufficiently funded from the wagers (see Acres col. 5, lines 1-2 and col. 6, lines 1-3).

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If the game requires a side bet in order to participate, then a similar situation arises. In that scenario, a player is simply required to bet more in order to be entitled to a bonus award.

In accordance with the invention, bonuses are funded apart from side bets or wagers. Thus, the award of bonuses does not affect the play of the game, including the probability of a player to win the game. In addition, funding of the bonus apart from game wagers permits bonuses to be awarded to players of different gaming machines independent of the games they present.

For example, in accordance with the invention, bonuses can randomly be awarded to players of any gaming machine, not just specific gaming machines which are linked and have wagers contributing to a bonus pool. Thus, a casino can specifically target machines which are not being played or are lesser played with bonus opportunities, apart from whether sufficient funds have specifically been wagered at those machines to fund a bonus pool.

Dependent Claims 21-24

These claims are believed to be allowable for at least the reason that they depend from Claim 20. In addition, however, these claims are believed to define patentable subject matter.

With respect to Claim 22, Applicant asserts that the prior art does not teach or suggest providing the indication of bonus award via a player tracking device associated with a gaming machine. This configuration has the advantage that a bonus can be awarded to a player of any gaming machine, even when the machine itself is not configured to award bonuses.

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As described above, one advantage of the invention is the ability to award bonuses at any gaming machine, including gaming machines where a portion of wagers are set aside to fund a bonus pool. Transmission of bonus information via the player tracking device further enables this feature.

As indicated, one advantage of the invention is the ability to fund and award bonuses independent of player wagers and game outcomes. In that sense, the bonuses are true "bonuses," in that they can be awarded anywhere, at any time, regardless of amounts bet, game outcome, or specific game configuration. Claim 23 further recites that the bonus is awarded independent of the outcome of the game played by the player.

Independent Claim 25

Independent Claim 25 recites a gaming system including multiple gaming machines with player tracking devices, a player tracking host and a bonus host. This claim is believed to be allowable for similar reasons to Claim 20, in that the system is configured so that bonus award are funded independently of specific wagers placed at the gaming machines. In addition, bonus award information is transmitted to a player via the player tracking device of the gaming machine.

Dependent Claims 26-30

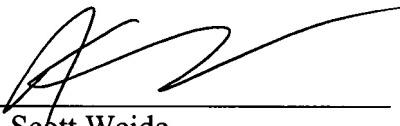
Claims 26-30 are believed to be allowable for at least the reason that they depend from allowable Claim 25. These claims are also believed to define independently patentable subject-matter. For example, Claim 30 recites such a system where bonus award information is printed on a ticket at a ticket printer of the player tracking device.

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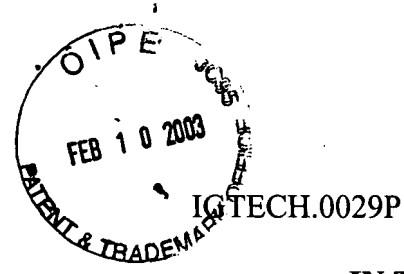
Summary

Applicant asserts that Claims 20-30 are in a condition for allowance and respectfully requests a notice as to the same. If any matters remain outstanding, the Examiner is invited to contact the undersigned by telephone.

Respectfully submitted,

Dated: February 3, 2003 By: 

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| Applicant | : Rick Rowe |) | Group Art Unit: 3713 |
| Appl. No. | : 09/965,908 |) | |
| Filed | : September 27, 2001 |) | |
| For | METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR FUNDING AND AWARDING BONUSES IN A GAMING ENVIRONMENT | | |
| Examiner | : Michael W. O'Neill |) | |

I hereby certify that this correspondence and all marked attachments are being deposited with the United States Postal Service as first-class mail in an envelope addressed to: Assistant Commissioner for Patents, Washington, D.C. 20231, on

February 3, 2003

~~R. Scott Weide, Reg. No. 37,755~~

ADDENDUM TO RESPONSE TO OFFICE ACTION

Assistant Commissioner for Patents
Washington, D.C. 20231

Dear Sir:

This is an Addendum to the Response to Office Action showing the changes made to the specification/claims made thereby.

IN THE SPECIFICATION:

Please replace the Abstract at Page 38 with:

A method and system are provided for awarding bonuses in a gaming environment. The system includes gaming machines associated with a player tracking host and a bonus system host. Each gaming machine has a player tracking device. In accordance with a method, a bonus is funded independently of specific wagers placed at the gaming machines. The bonus system host configures bonus event information which is presented via the player tracking devices of the gaming machines.

In the event a player is a bonus event winner, bonus award information is transmitted to the player

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via the player tracking device. The bonus is awarded based on criteria independent of the outcome of a game played by the player at the gaming machine. The system and method provide for the award of bonuses independent of the configuration of the games the gaming machine presents, player wagers or game outcome [A method and system for providing a bonus to a player of a game in a gaming environment are disclosed. In one embodiment, the method comprises determining if a player is eligible to participate in a bonus event, such as by determining that a player is playing a game via a player tracking network. Next, it is determined if the player is a winner of a bonus of the bonus event, such as by meeting one or more bonus event criteria. The criteria are preferably independent of the specific outcome of the game played by the player. Bonus information is generated and provided to the player. In one embodiment, the bonus system includes a player tracking system comprising a player tracking device at a gaming machine, a remote player tracking host and a network by which information may be sent to and from the player tracking device and player tracking host. The bonus system includes a bonus system host associated with the network, the bonus system host capable of generating bonus event information which is transmitted to the player tracking device via the network. In one embodiment, the player tracking device includes a player tracking device controller and one or more peripherals, such as a card reader, display and speakers. Bonus event information is displayed and audible information is generated in response to the sending of bonus event information from the bonus event host to the player tracking device controller].